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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of special education in many parts of the world has brought about much new knowledge and the need for a global information and documentation service. To pull together world-wide information and documentation, UNESCO, the Bureau of International Education, the Council of Europe, the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), and other national and international organizations dedicated to the education of exceptional children should unite in forming a special education information system with an international readership. To do this, there are several problems that must be solved which relate to funding, the selection and processing of data, translations of pertinent literature, and procedures for publishing. (Author/SBH)

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An International Bibliography in Special Education: A Felt Need

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of special education in many parts of the world has brought about much new knowledge and the need for a global information and documentation service. It is recommended that UNESCO, the Bureau of International Education, the Council of Europe, the Educational Resources Information Center, and other national and international organizations dedicated to the education of exceptional children unite in forming a special education information system with a world-wide readership. To do this, there are several problems that must be solved. They relate to funding, organization, the selection and processing of data, translations of pertinent literature, and procedures for publishing.

An International Bibliography in Special Education: A Felt Need

The rapid expansion of special education and related services in many parts of the world in recent years has brought about an immense amount of new knowledge. It has also led to the creation of a large number of teachers, child care workers, and other professionals who need this information. In this paper, I shall briefly describe the present status and dilemna regarding the dissemination of literature in special education, relate some laudable efforts to organize a bibliographical information and dissemination system, and present a proposal for a global information and documentation service in special education.

At the dawn of our profession, teachers did not hesitate to go to other countries and even continents to learn new methods to educate the handicapped. When Pestalozzi started his school for orphans and underprivileged children in Switzerland around the beginning of the 19th century, educators flocked to him from all over Europe to observe. Gallaudet studied under Abbe Sicard in Paris before establishing his own school for the deaf in Connecticut in 1817. Not much later, Howe visited schools for the blind in England and France to gather information for his own program in Boston.

Travel as a form of learning has continued until the present and is doubtless still in many ways the best method of getting the most accurate knowledge in one's field. However, it is often

impractical, and the professional community must rely more and more on the written word as a medium of gaining information.

The need for more effective dissemination and exchange of new ideas, promising experiments, and innovative programs and practices exists on local and national levels as well as on a global scale. There are many obstacles to progress. Sometimes, channels of communications have not been opened simply because of ignorance. At other times, an institution may be afraid that others may steal its ideas. Once I asked the chairman of a university special education department to tell about his successful program of sending his students to Europe to do their practicum. He declined with the words, "We are playing our cards close to our chests." Many places one can find a trend towards isolation and insularism which is supported by political and ideological antagonisms. Among some radical special educators in Western Europe an American is by definition an anathema. Conversely, many good innovations in Eastern Europe have not gained acceptance in the Western World for reasons probably related to their "Communist" associations.

Language barriers and ethnocentric self-sufficiency also take their toll. It is a constant source of amazement, for example, to observe how little the French know about the many advances in special education in the Anglo-Saxon culture during the last several decades and also how little impact French accomplishments have had in other countries.

On the other hand, some noteworthy efforts have been made both on a national and international scale to provide more access to valuable literature. Best known is without doubt the American Educational Resources Information Center - ERIC. It began in 1966 and was designed and supported by the U.S. Office of Education to make available to educators the results of exemplary programs, research, and developmental efforts. A network of specialized centers or clearinghouses collect, abstract and index relevant literature. This material is then produced in a series of publications. The Council of Exceptional Children serves as the clearinghouse for literature on handicapped children. It examines regularly 200 journals for material. Articles that meet established criteria are abstracted and published in Exceptional Child Education Abstracts (ECEA). Some articles also appear in the Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE). CEC-ERIC also publishes a series of selective bibliographies on specific topics and even provides the service of a computer search for references on more specialized subjects. About two dozen of the journals consulted by CEC-ERIC are from other countries. They are all in English, however, which limits the international coverage.

In the late 1960's the member states of the Council of Europe began to experiment with the application of computer techniques in processing and disseminating educational information. A number of feasibility studies have been carried out. Since 1975 several experimental bibliographical bulletins have been published. One has been on audio-visual teaching aids, one on educational periodicals, and

three on educational research and development. Twelve countries have participated in the latest project: Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. A unified indexing system has been developed, and the abstracts are either in English, French, or German. Each country serves as a clearinghouse with the responsibility vested in a specific agency, which may be a ministry, a national library, or a research institute. The cooperation of additional countries is under consideration.

The International Bureau of Education has for over fifty years published a quarterly Bulletin on diverse educational topics. Frequently an issue actually consists of an annotated bibliography. A 1970 issue on special education contains about 350 annotated references. They are divided into four chapters: Organization of special education, teaching and learning, prevention of handicap, and vocational training and integration. The contributions from different countries are grouped under twelve language headings. In 1971 the name of the Bulletin was changed to Educational Documentation and Information. One issue in 1973 was devoted to education and mental health. One 1977 issue is called Current Bibliographical Sources in Education. It lists about 150 important bibliographical sources on education throughout the world. Many of these sources could no doubt be called upon to serve in a clearinghouse network in special education.

On a national basis some systematic information services have been initiated. In West Germany, Kluge and Schindele began in 1970 a publication called Information Service on Special Education (Sonderpadagogischer Informations Dienst). Summaries of new publications in special education and rehabilitation are recorded on file cards for easy management. The publisher uses the same system for an international bibliography on behavior disordered children.

In Norway, the University Library in Oslo has through a committee on pedagogical studies (Norsk Pedagogisk Studiesamling) published several comprehensive bibliographies. In 1973 a volume on special education appeared with about a thousand references. Most of them were taken from Scandinavian literature. The following year the University Library issued another volume on speech therapy with about 500 references. The committee is working energetically to broaden its international connections and coverage.

Another development in Norway is the formation of a National Council on Educational Information and Documentation (Norsk Utval for Pedagogisk Informasjon og Dokumentasjon). The members represent the Ministry of Education, the National Library Service, the teacher training organizations and the teachers association. In a 1977 publication, the Council submitted a report on the status of educational documentation, the needs for better service, and the problems being encountered. In its recommendations the Council was strongly in favor of an association with an international information system and of the regular publications of bibliographies on special subjects.

In France, the Centre Technique National d'Etudes de Recherches sur les Handicaps et les Inadaptations was established in 1975. Its major purpose is to collect and disseminate information. The Centre has published a considerable number of bibliographies that focus on special subjects, such as prevention of maladjustments, education in institutions, foster placement, and sheltered workshops.

In Great Britain, the National Society for Mentally Handicapped Children has produced a booklist including more than five hundred publications which also includes journals, directories, and pamphlets. The National Bureau for Cooperation in Child Care has published two volumes on on-going and completed research on handicapped children. Almost 1,500 research studies from several countries have been abstracted in the fields of physical disabilities.

A major Swedish effort has been a bibliography with a list of a thousand titles of books, reports, and other documents about the handicapped. Most of the references were from Swedish literature.

Many other bibliographical services in special education and related fields have sprung up in other parts of the world. For example, the Ministry of Education in Quebec, Canada, produces in French a bibliographic index for teachers of maladjusted children.

The formation of a coordinated, world wide information and documentation service is at this point urgently needed. The time is also ripe to pull together and orchestrate the efforts that are already being made into a more comprehensive program.

The following recommendations are therefore presented:

1. An agreement should be made including UNESCO, the Bureau of International Education, the Council of Europe, the Educational Resources Information Center, and other national and international organizations dedicated to the education of exceptional children to unite in creating a global documentation and information service.
2. As a second step, a committee needs to be established with representatives from the participating countries to set goals, formulate procedures, and secure funding.
3. Thirdly, a contract must be made with either an existing or a new agency to assume the responsibility of receiving, processing, and publishing the data.
4. Fourthly, a global network of clearinghouses must be organized to identify and abstract significant literature within their specific geographic areas.
5. Finally, decisions will have to be made about the languages in which the bibliographical material will be printed and about mechanics of translating pertinent literature.

Clearly, the task ahead is an enormous one. To accomplish it will require the dedication of numerous people in many lands and the pulling together of all the available expertise. It is, however, a worthy goal that we must work for if we want to create a better education in the future for children with special needs.

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